

Meeting Minutes

Sierra Front - Northwestern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council March 2, 2006

BLM Carson City Field Office
Carson City, Nevada

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I. RAC Attendance and Welcome

9:02 a.m., Thursday, March 2, 2006 – Meeting Called to Order by Chairman Gebhardt with the following members of the RAC present.

SIERRA FRONT – NORTHWESTERN GREAT BASIN RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Council Member	Resource/Expertise	Thursday, Mar. 2
John Gebhardt – Chair	State Agency	X
Larie Trippet – Vice Chair	Public-At-Large	
Laura S. Crane	Environmental	X
John E. Dicks	Recreation	X
Rochanne Downs	Native Americans	X
James Eidel	Wildlife	X
John Falen	Nevada Cattlemen	X
Jerry Hepworth	Energy/Minerals	
Patricia Herzog	Elected Official	X
John Mudge	Mining	X
Ernest Paine	Livestock	X
William Roullier	Transportation/ROW	
Vernon Schulze	Wild Horses	
Sherm Swanson	Academic	X
D. Craig Young	Archeology	X

BLM staff present: Don Hicks, Field Manager, Carson City Field Office (CCFO); Gail Givens, Field Manager, Winnemucca Field Office (WFO); Bryant Smith, Associate Field Manager, CCFO; Jo Simpson, Chief Office of Communications, Nevada State Office (NSO); Meg Jensen, Deputy State Director, Resources, Lands and Planning; Leo Drumm Outdoor Recreation Planner/Recreation Travel & Access Coordinator; Elroy Masters, Wildlife Biologist, NSO; Dan Jacquet, Community Partnership Coordinator, CCFO; Claudia Funari, Wildlife Management Biologist, CCFO; Terri Knutson, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, CCFO; Terry Knight, Lead Outdoor Recreation Planner, CCFO; Dean Tonenna, Plant Ecologist, CCFO; Mark Struble, Public Affairs Specialist, CCFO; Jamie Thompson, Public Affairs Officer, WFO; Nancy Thompson, Secretary, WFO.

Public present: Chip Kramer NAS Fallon; Tom Baker, Capital City/County Liaison State & Private Forestry, US Forest Service (USFS) Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest; Dave Loomis, Environmental Planner, Carson Ranger District, USFS Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest; Brian Doyal, Pine Nut Mountains Trail Association; Jeanette Dahl, Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance; Rick Gray, City of Fallon; Richard Hilton, Friends of Sand Mountain; Dan Peterson California Off-Road Vehicle Association (CORVA); Skip Canfield, State Land Use Planning Agency; Bob Donahue; Laurie Sada, Assistant Field Supervisor, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Reno; Steve Caicos, USFWS, Reno; Brad T. Goetsch, Manager, Churchill County; Terry Reed.

II. Summary of Motions

MOVED – by Jim Eidel that the RAC support BLM in providing the training to the permittees to support monitoring that the MOU requires.

SECOND – by John Falen with the addition “that these funds be startup funds.”

DISCUSSION – John Dicks told the RAC that he was puzzled by the discussion. He said his experience with the chemical and petroleum industries is that monitoring is always required. The permittees should want to do the monitoring themselves. He said he suspects the cow guys know more about the cattle business. He thought the RAC had moved on after the discussion at the last meeting. He said that he doesn’t understand why the permittees are not interested in pushing for this. He doesn’t understand why the BLM is not pushing for this. Gail answered that there are two ranchers in the Northeastern Nevada RAC area, one out of the Elko office and one out of the Battle Mountain district who are conducting pilots. He doesn’t know where they are in the process. John Mudge asked if there wasn’t a way to use technology to monitor range across the state. THE MOTION WAS TABLED until the IB could be studied further by the RAC.

Later in the meeting the motion and the second were withdrawn after Jamie Thompson told the RAC members that the motion should be changed to remove any reference to funding. The RAC cannot advise BLM on budget matters.

MOVED – by Jim Eidel that BLM has the ultimate responsibility for monitoring the management of rangelands toward meeting RAC Standards and plan objectives. Toward that end the RAC encourages cooperative monitoring & training for cooperative monitoring as described in the PLC/BLM or USFS Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the BLM State Director’s IB No. NV-2006-023. In the case that the permittee does not engage in monitoring, the RAC recognizes that it will be done by BLM or qualified contractors or volunteers. Due to the RAC’s interest in cooperative monitoring, we would like periodic updates on the accomplishment of these endeavors.

SECOND – by John Falen.

Discussion – There was no further discussion.

APPROVED – by acclamation.

MOVED – by John Gebhardt as a motion of the members present to endorse the planning process for the blue butterfly.

SECOND – by John Dicks.

DISCUSSION – John Dicks said he would like to see Rochanne Down’s response a little more positive on the cultural aspects. Rochanne answered that she does share some of her opinions with the group but her Tribe’s

opinions are between their government and the BLM. She continued that personally she thought the plan was a good start. John Gebhardt reminded the RAC that the Plan is just for the butterfly, not a land use plan. John Falen commented that he would vote for the motion on the table out of respect for the people who have worked on the problem.
APPROVED – with one abstention by Rochanne Downs.

III. Summary of Action Assignments

1. BLM Winnemucca Field Office was asked by the RAC to provide to the members any of the three grazing for cheat grass control project monitoring reports that are available before the Winnemucca meeting in June.
2. BLM Carson City Field Office said they would furnish the RAC with a new table of organization.
3. BLM Carson City Field Office was asked by Patti Herzog to furnish the Winnemucca RMP subgroup with information on the RMP Amendment for Denton Rawhide when it is completed.
4. BLM Carson City Field Office said it would furnish the RAC with an itemized business accounting of Sand Mountain Recreation Area at the end of FY 2006.
5. The RAC asked that an update on monitoring be put on the agenda for the June 28-29 meeting in Winnemucca.

IV. Minutes from the Meeting in Elko, Nevada, October 21, 2005

MOVED – by John Falen to approve the minutes as written.
SECOND – by Rochanne Downs.
DISCUSSION – There was no discussion.
APPROVED – by acclamation.

V. RAC Subcommittee Reports

Reports from the RAC subcommittees were tabled since all the subcommittee chairs were absent – Jerry Hepworth, Winnemucca RMP subcommittee; Sherm Swanson RMP subcommittee vice chair (Sherm was present at the afternoon session only) and Vern Schulze, Wildhorse Guidelines subcommittee.

VI. US Forest Service Update

Dave Loomis gave an update on USFS Carson and Bridgeport Ranger Districts, part of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and working closely with the CCFO. Dave told the RAC he had worked in land use planning and environmental issues for both districts and also worked with livestock standards and guides for BLM CCFO.

The Santa Rosa Ranger District also works closely with the WFO. District Ranger Jose Noriega will be giving an update on activities in his district at the next RAC meeting in Winnemucca in June.

A. *Carson Ranger District*

- The Carson Ranger District manages a half million acres.
- Their main focus right now is fire and fuels issues. They are still dealing with the 2005 Waterfall Fire west of Carson City and its aftermath. The initial reseedling effort has been successful. 125,000 trees, mostly Jeffrey pine, all from local seed sources, will be planted on the hill.
- The Highway 50 fire is being rehabbed by replanting bitterbrush.
- A major prevention effort with mechanical treatment has been initiated in the northern Washoe Valley.
- The USFS will be conducting prescribed burning of brush piles this winter.

Jim Eidel asked if there will be runoff in the steep areas where the timber sale is taking place. Tom Baker answered the USFS is preserving the larger trees and constructing SPLATS (Strategically Placed Lands Area Treatments).

- BLM has asked the Carson Ranger District to be a cooperating agency for their resource management plan working on the road system on boundaries of BLM districts and USFS ranger districts. The two agencies share management of the East Carson River from its headwaters to the Ruhenstroth area. The project will be available for public review at the end of May. There is a potential for wild and scenic river design. There is significant Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use on the riverbanks. Increasing recreation use along the river is causing human waste and trash problems. The Forest Service is working on a solution.

B. *Bridgeport Ranger District*

- The Bridgeport Ranger District covers 1.3 million acres.
- The Ranger District is working on rehab from the Cannon Fire, thinning smaller trees.

- USFS is cooperating with Lyon County and BLM on the Lyon County lands bill particularly boundaries of areas currently defined as wilderness. The USFS is not taking any position on this issue at this time, only providing information.

John Falen commented that these were designated wilderness areas. Dave Loomis answered that this is a local project in Lyon County working with the Congressional delegation.

Tom Baker commented that these were wilderness study areas. He said it was his understanding that it is policy to eliminate some of these that are not appropriate areas for wilderness anymore.

John Dicks commented that one of the things that disturbed him was privilege. He asked if the Marines are cooperating with the Cannon Fire. Dave Loomis told him the Marines are not supposed to be in the Cannon Fire area. The USFS standard approach is to let the Marines know what areas they are supposed to be in and what areas to stay out of.

Laura Crane asked about thinning the upper watershed. The eastern side of the Carson River has been studied by the Nature Conservancy. Dave told her the USFS has been working with the Carson Water Conservancy District. Three-quarters of the area is in California. The upper part of the river will be kept in a pristine state.

VII. Field Manager's Reports

A. *Winnemucca Field Manager Gail Given's Report*

Gail told the RAC that the report they received at the meeting was a little different from the draft they received earlier. Pictures and the Winnemucca RMP timeline were added. He said he would not review the report since the RAC already received it but would be glad to answer questions.

The response to Jim Eidel's question at the last RAC meeting, if there was sage-grouse money available to do monitoring of grazing control of cheat grass, was added to the final copy of the report. Gail told the RAC that the short answer is no. BLM has a field trip planned for the Winnemucca meeting to at least one of the project areas. Jim told the RAC he asked BLM Director Kathleen Clarke especially about this at a governor's sage-grouse meeting. She said there was money available for monitoring. She mentioned \$3 million for the western states. Bryant Smith commented that the money that came in was not earmarked for sage-grouse. How much money the field offices get depends on projects submitted. A lot of the monies went to states that had energy projects.

John Dicks asked about the three wild horses that were shot. He commented that a lot of that area is wilderness. He asked if it looked like they were shot off the road. Gail told him it looked like it. There is an ongoing investigation. He said it doesn't sound like there is enough evidence at this time to make the investigation too promising.

John Falen commented that the Wildfire Support Group (WSG) offered to do a controlled program using livestock grazing [to control] cheat grass. They would still like to go ahead with that. The Daveytown area is ideal. The WSG talked about fencing off an area and doing the research, but it is not in a really good cheat grass area. Jim Eidel commented that the idea was presented to the RAC at the meeting in Winnemucca when the group went up into the Montanas. John answered the area is relatively small to put in an electric fence and water. Jim asked who the permittees were who were mentioned in the response in the report. Jamie Thompson answered that it was John Falen's allotment. He continued that Mike Whalen, Fire Management Specialist WSG and Fuels, wasn't sure the information would be processed for the other two projects by the June RAC meeting in Winnemucca. Jim said he thought the RAC should know whether the monitoring is [being conducted] by permittees or Utah State University. The RAC members were told BLM would be cooperating with the USFS. The area should be monitored in a way that the RAC knows whether the range is getting better or worse. He said he would like to see this issue on the next RAC agenda. Gail commented that this project is being conducted by Utah State. The progress is tied to funding. Some of the projects require NEPA work. BLM simply doesn't have the money for some of the monitoring. These three projects are going forward.

John Falen told the RAC that the bottom line of this whole effort with the Cattlemen's Association is that they would offer to do cooperative monitoring with the WFO. He continued that as Gail said the bottom line is money. The first thing that goes by the wayside is the monitoring. If we don't get some interest in cooperation with BLM, John said he is ready to go ahead with it himself. Gail told the RAC that a BLM Information Bulletin (IB) was issued by the NSO laying out BLM support of cooperative monitoring. Jim Eidel asked for a copy. Copies were provided to all the RAC members.

Laura Crane commented she didn't understand if lack of funding was an obstacle to getting it started. Gail answered that it can be. The idea of cooperative monitoring has been on the agenda every meeting since he became field manager. There has been a lot of discussion in trying to get the ideas agreed on, how it will be done, what result BLM is looking for. The other part of it is that BLM staffing levels are such that even if the money is there it will be hard to put the program together with one of the permittees.

John Falen commented that it is difficult to get the ranchers to do cooperative monitoring. One reason is they don't understand the process. The second reason is that they're leery about opening doors they don't want to open.

The RAC asked to receive any of the three project monitoring reports that are available before the Winnemucca meeting.

Terry Reed commented that there had been several comments made about how BLM can't accept or defend the monitoring reports if the permittees are doing them. He said he doesn't accept that at all. There is a BLM process for permittee monitoring that does hold up in court. Training can be provided. Once a permittee agrees to do monitoring that should be part of the permit.

Jim Eidel asked if there is a line item anywhere in the budget to get this program started, to provide the training.

Gail and Don both answered that there isn't. Gail commented that there had been some interest on the part of the Congressional committee but it never happened.

MOVED – by Jim Eidel that the RAC support BLM in providing the training to the permittees to support monitoring that the MOU requires.

SECOND – by John Falen with the addition “that these funds be startup funds.”

DISCUSSION – John Dicks told the RAC that he was puzzled by the discussion. He said his experience with the chemical and petroleum industries is that monitoring is always required. The permittees should want to do the monitoring themselves. He thought the RAC had moved on after the discussion at the last meeting. He said that he didn't understand why the permittees were not interested in pushing for this. He doesn't understand why the BLM is not pushing for this. Gail answered that there are two ranchers in the Northeastern Nevada RAC area, one out of the Elko office and one out of the Battle Mountain district who are conducting pilots. He doesn't know where they are in the process. John Mudge asked if there wasn't a way to use technology to monitor range across the state. THE MOTION WAS TABLED until the IB could be studied further by the RAC.

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SECOND – by John Falen.

Discussion – There was no further discussion.

APPROVED – by acclamation.

Laura Crane thanked Gail for the map included with the field manager's report.

John Mudge commented that he had been hearing rumors about the Sempra plant over the past week. He asked Gail if there was more to the story that he couldn't talk about. Gail answered that there was more to the story and no he couldn't talk about it. He said what he read in the newspaper pretty much followed what Sempra told BLM in a recent meeting.

John Dicks asked how many kilowatt hours they are asking for. Gail answered 1,200. Sempra is looking at their hold cards because of the opposition to the project and the amount of water available. They are looking at their options. BLM is still looking at the baseline data.

John Mudge commented that he read in the report that the Western Watersheds group ended their litigation. He said he'd heard a lot about the group and wondered if they were branching out. He would like to understand what the group is all about; if they do a lot of litigation and if it is mostly about grazing. Gail answered that they do a lot of litigation and appealing at all the field offices in northern Nevada. The name of the group was Idaho's High Desert at one time, then High Desert now Western Watersheds.

John Falen commented that the principals for the group are John Marvel and Katie Fite.

B. Carson City Field Manager Don Hick's Report

Don told the RAC that a lot of the CCFO report would be heard in detail as the day moved on, but he would be glad to answer questions.

Rochanne Downs asked what the meaning was of the sentence "after some minor communication problems, the CCFO and USFS have cooperatively restarted Native American consultation" concerning the CCFO Energy Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Don suggested that Rochanne ask Terri Knutson during her presentation.

1. A public open house workshop for the Alpine County (California) RMP Amendment was held in conjunction with the Alpine County Board of Supervisors meeting on March 21 in Markleeville, California. BLM only has about 18-19,000 acres in that area. The RMP Amendment principally addresses land tenure issues.
2. CCFO is only responsible for site security at the Yerington Mine and is working with Atlantic Richfield to get the fence built.
3. The Ruhenstroth vehicle restrictions kiosk signing project with the Pine Nut Trails Association is ongoing. One kiosk has been put on site.

John Dicks asked what State Question 1 funding was. Patti Herzog told him it is funding for parks and recreation, and historical preservation.

The RAC discussed ATV stickers. At this time there is no fee to license ATVs in Nevada. Jo Simpson told the RAC she was sure this issue will come up again in the Legislature. John Dicks commented that unlicensed ATVs were being driven on paved roads with no penalty for tearing up the ditches.

4. Lyon County is reconsidering their lands bill. Washoe County has been working on their bill but BLM has not been asked to attend their meetings.

Patti Herzog commented that it's a three to four year process to get a lands bill completed. Don commented that BLM has a lot of lands that the counties have their eyes on for expansion. Gail commented that the wilderness part of the Washoe County bill affects the WFO. The urban interface part affects CCFO.

John Dicks commented that the presentation [Public Lands and the Changing West] by the professor at the Las Vegas Tri RAC meeting [in 2004] was very valuable. There has been turnover in BLM management and in the RAC since the presentation. Mark Struble suggested that the topic be put on the agenda for the 2006 Tri RAC meeting.

Jo Simpson commented that BLM is neutral on the policy on annexation by cities. The land use plan for public lands is the guiding policy no matter where the administrative boundaries are.

John Dicks commented that somewhere in the back of their minds the RAC should think about Love Canal as the BLM gets more pressure to sell land and make it available for development. "Don't sell flood plane land to a guy who's going to put 50 homes on it." Jo Simpson commented that Congress can trump this. Don commented that John's counsel was well taken.

5. The North Valleys Water Project EIS has been through the process. The CCFO is working with USFWS to complete BLM's Biological Opinion. The proponents are ready to move forward this summer. BLM's role is only to issue the rights-of-way. The State Water Engineer dictates where the water comes from and the communities dictate
6. The CCFO has taken some internal steps and can provide the RAC with a new table of organization. Dan Jacquet is now Community Partnership Coordinator for pieces of land BLM has acquired, working with the communities on county lands bills. Elayn Briggs is AFM for Renewable Resources. Bryant Smith is the new Associate Field Manager.

Patti Herzog asked when the RMP Amendment for Denton Rawhide will be completed. It would be valuable information for the Winnemucca RMP Subgroup. Don told her he would get the information from Terri Knutson.

John Dicks commented that the CCFO could accomplish some positive image building if Tom Crawford, Pine Nut Land Use Plan Team Leader, would drop a postcard to the public who have expressed interest in the Plan saying BLM hasn't forgotten them and will get in touch with them.

Craig Young expressed support for the efforts of one of the CCFO archeologists who succumbed to cancer late last year.

VIII. Carson City Field Office Energy RMP Amendment/EIS

Terri Knutson told the RAC that the Energy RMP Amendment/EIS is ready to go to internal briefing at the BLM State Office. Several briefings will be given to the Washington office. The *Federal Register* Notice will be sent in after the State Office briefing.

Terri showed the RAC a map of areas and restrictions including Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) closed to energy development. Sage-grouse use areas are not closed. Criteria have been developed for areas closed to leasing. Leasing was closed five years ago under the BLM Southern Washoe Plan. There is a one-mile buffer around historic trails. Several other restrictions are added in the Amendment. Oil and gas and geothermal lands are leasable not saleable.

John Dicks suggested that solar and wind developments have bonds to cover restoration. Terri told him that no one there disagrees with that. John continued that it seemed to him that there was a misconception about how much disturbance there would be with solar and wind developments. Would BLM allow solar development where there are sage-grouse problems? Terri answered that the Population Management Units (PMUs) are open with high restraints.

Jim Eidel commented that he was concerned about impacts to sage-grouse by rights-of-way that lead to roads. He said it is the fragmentation that is taking place to get to the wind developments that he's concerned about. Terri answered that this EIS identifies areas in the field office that are already closed. Nothing can be implemented on the ground from this Plan Amendment. There is nothing in the national wind energy policy that prohibits wind development in critical sage-grouse areas.

Laura Crane asked what the reason was for the previous closings. Terri answered that some of it was part of the Washoe County Plan Amendment. Many public meetings were held on this issue and the closed areas are the result of what the people wanted at the time.

John Mudge asked why some of the areas are closed. Gail Givens answered that some of this is an attempt to be more responsive to the Administration.

Once the process is completed and the decision is signed there will be a map available to potential leasees as to where they can and can't lease. The state office issues leases which gives the proponent the ability to lease. Then the applications are sent to the field offices.

Jim Eidel commented that maybe we are in the age when we should look at cheaper helicopter access rather than building a road.

Biomass has been considered, but BLM doesn't usually have that much material.

Terri showed the RAC a map of military training routes in air space. The military is very concerned about energy development towers, especially towers over 200 feet. All of the military training routes are not used all the time but they are used quite a bit more in Nevada because there are many pilots trained here. The military realizes they have no authority to issue leases, BLM does, but on the other hand BLM has no authority over military training routes.

Chip Kramer told the RAC that until last summer, NAS Fallon was only looking at their operating air space. The Navy is now training to deal with wind energy development towers. Air to ground level may be 100 feet. A meteorological tower of 165 feet is one thing, but actual development with wind towers at up to 600 feet may be a problem. BLM certainly needs to consult with the military and so do the proponents but BLM will probably not say no to development because of consideration for the military.

Rochanne Downs commented that the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe appreciates notification up front so everyone knows from the very beginning what is being proposed.

Sherm Swanson asked if the development especially wind will be concentrated away from the I-80 corridor. Terri answered that CCFO doesn't have much of the I-80 corridor WFO does. Gail Givens commented that the corridor is less restrictive because of the checkerboard land along it.

IX. Pine Nut Mountain RMP Amendment/DEIS

Bryant Smith gave the RAC an update on transportation and recreation elements of the Pine Nut Mountains RMP Amendment. The plan is driven by transportation, land disposal and land tenure. He showed a PowerPoint presentation including a map showing BLM lands within the Pine Nuts. Previous planning efforts in the area date back to the 1980s. The decision was to keep the area open. BLM is attempting to designate roads and trails.

Bryant displayed another map showing paved roads, gravel roads and bladed roads.

The third map showed Indian Trust areas.

The 13,000 acre Burbank WSA is being studied. The BLM recommendation is that it not be converted to wilderness.

In Alternative 1 the BLM is looking at the expanding recreation area, including dispersed camping and ATV activity.

Areas being studied include –

- The Churchill Narrows buckwheat ACEC
- Areas of high erosion probability
- Sage-grouse habitat

- View sheds, dust, noise

The area includes Native American trust lands. There are modest to high density areas of people on the west, northwest and southwest areas.

There is a proposed wild horse and burro center concept with Lyon County to promote tourism and BLM adoption. Five million dollars is earmarked for the proponents through the University of Nevada Reno and the county. Don Hicks told the RAC this is a placeholder in the Plan because the outcome of the project is unknown.

This Alternative will include power lines and gas line corridors and the Ruhenstroth paleological preservation area. Seasonal restrictions will be tied to sage-grouse habitat and high erosion areas.

Alternative 2 adds an urban interface zone. Motorized routes are major trails.

In Alternative 3 the area to the east, far from the urban interface, would be managed for less density of trails. Play areas would be included for displaced use from the urban interface area.

The BLM strategy is to put out a draft document that will outline all of the alternatives. The BLM preferred alternative will take pieces of each of the above alternatives. The RAC subcommittee will help sort out the alternatives between the time of the draft and the final document based on public input.

Terry Reed asked if access across private land has been addressed. Don Hicks told him BLM is starting with legal access routes and going from there.

John Dicks commented he was delighted to see BLM considering where things go when they shut things down. Decide where things should go and respond to the public's needs.

Don Hicks commented that balancing the issues is no small task especially with the urbanization. That is why the BLM is taking time over it. A better more involved process is the current plan. He thanked his staff for their work. The plan is to have the draft out in June or July. At that point BLM will brief the RAC and engage the subcommittees.

Sherm Swanson commented that his sense is that the pinion juniper issue in the area relates to the issue of range land health in the sense that the growth of trees takes out the under story so that when it burns you open up the area to loss of resistance that could encourage the cheat grass fire cycle. He asked if that issue is being addressed clearly in this plan. Don Hicks answered he wasn't sure BLM has clearly addressed it or not. The BLM can do that when they engage more with the public.

Don also commented that he was asked by a member of the public if this document could be made available to Carson City County and other counties at this time. He said no. He

was also asked by a member of the public to extend an invitation to the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe to engage in reviewing the document and about disposal of BLM lands to the Tribe or disposal of Tribal land to the BLM.

X. Sand Mountain Business Plan

CCFO Supervisory Recreation Planner Terry Knight gave the RAC an update on Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 collections and expenditures at the Sand Mountain Recreation Area. [BLM fiscal years run from October 1 to September 30.]

BLM started collecting fees at Sand Mountain in March 2003.

- In FY 2004 approximately \$169,000 was taken in. Approximately \$123,000 was spent, the greatest amount of money being spent on law enforcement, public contact etc. 56,000 people visited the area.
- In FY 2005 \$198,000 was taken in. BLM spent \$164,000 in the fee structure, but the total expended was closer to \$300,000. BLM implemented the designated trail system. 66,000 people visited the area.
- As of February 27, 2006 \$178,000 had been taken in. The fees had been doubled. BLM is projecting taking in approx \$300,000 in Fiscal Year 2006. To date BLM has spent about \$92,000. There are still large holiday weekends coming up this year. BLM anticipates visitation will go up in 2006. There have been 500 – 1,000 people visiting the area on a regular weekend this year.

Total passes sold –

FY 2004 – 6,716 passes

FY 2005 – 7,937 passes

As of February 27, 2006 – 3,592 already sold

BLM will give the RAC an itemized business accounting at the end of FY 2006.

XI. Sand Mountain Conservation Strategy

Claudia Funari told the RAC about the BLM conservation strategy and implementation for Sand Mountain. She told the members that BLM has been working with the butterfly conservation team since the beginning.

The Conservation Plan and Agreement for the Sand Mountain Blue Butterfly was developed by the BLM, the City of Fallon, Churchill County, the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, several Sand Mountain user groups, USFWS, US Naval Air Station Fallon and private citizens to provide long term protection for the butterfly. Cooperators also include the California Off-Road Vehicle Association (CORVA), and the Friends of Sand Mountain.

The Sand Mountain Recreation Area has both an open designation management area and a limited designation management area. There are approximately 1700 acres of Kearney buckwheat. The Sand Mountain blue butterfly feeds exclusively on the buckwheat plant.

OHV use is one of the major threats to the butterfly habitat, not to the butterfly itself. The decline of the host plant could lead to direct mortality of the butterfly adult, larvae and pupae, but this type of threat has not been researched or documented.

The Sand Mountain ecosystem has seen a measurable increase in invasive annual weed species, in particular Russian thistle and cheat grass. Invasive weed seeds are spread through wind, cattle and OHV use. After routes were designated and there was a quantity of rainfall, the weeds came back rather than the buckwheat.

There is no evidence that mature or seedling Kearney buckwheat plants are palatable to cattle. Evidence of grazing seedlings and trampling has been observed and there may be threats to the buckwheat but more information is needed to determine the level of the threat.

This species is listed as a Nevada State BLM Sensitive Species. BLM policy is to provide these sensitive species with the same level of protection as is provided for candidate species in BLM manual 6840.06 C to “ensure that actions authorized, funded or carried out do not contribute to the need for the species to become listed.” The draft Conservation Plan and Agreement states that because of inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms the BLM has failed in this endeavor. The BLM is trying to address the threats to the butterfly habitat by changing management actions.

Conservation actions include –

- Designation of routes – limit motorized vehicles within the Sand Mountain dune habitat routes. Close about 1800 acres. Fence off certain areas. Implement the proposed route system based on the encouraged route system.
- Increased law enforcement – randomly on light weekends. Churchill County law enforcement regulations will be amended to allow county law enforcement officers to help BLM at Sand Mountain.
- Education – on the butterfly and on the routes and provide pamphlets, brochures and websites.
- Route, sign and fence maintenance.
- Livestock removal – all allotment holders would be notified. Modify grazing allotment boundaries. Fence approximately four linear miles of land around the dune system consistent with topographic deterrents.

Research and monitoring are key components to the conservation and planning effort.

Knowledge gaps will be filled in to include –

- Butterfly population status and habitat requirements
- Buckwheat population status and habitat requirements
- Mapping and tracking buckwheat and weeds
- Remote sensing of habitat characteristics, trends and route analyses

- Buckwheat propagation and transplantation
- Possibility of setting carrying capacity

OHV route monitoring will be evaluated every six months. Criteria for route success will determine whether a route segment is successful. Unacceptable, unfenced route system segments will be fenced. Law enforcement, education, routes, signs and fence maintenance will be evaluated. The first year evaluations will take place every three months. Strategies will be evaluated every six months.

The pre-briefing for Friday's field trip to Sand Mountain was not necessary. The field trip was cancelled due to poor weather conditions.

XII. Sand Mountain Monitoring Report & Habitat Situation

Dean Tonenna presented a PowerPoint follow up on habitat monitoring in the Sand Mountain Recreation Area.

Staff is working on getting the Kearney buckwheat areas mapped but the mapping has not been completed. Dean is expecting the mapping to show there are about 600 acres of Kearney buckwheat. BLM will begin to map other sensitive plant species next summer. Dean also hopes to put out study plots. BLM will also map areas damaged by people starting fires in the vegetation.

Roughly 1,000 acres of shrub vegetation exist at this time. Kearney buckwheat is one of 14 shrubs found in the Sand Mountain area. The Kearney buckwheat on the east side of the area seems to be in better condition than the west side that has been impacted longer. There are some monocultures of plants in pockets. BLM plans to protect areas that exist and restore other areas. Kearney buckwheat shrubs in the swale areas may survive due to there being plants of varying ages.

Weed annuals are a concern. It is unknown how far into the dune system they will migrate.

The BLM will use remote sensing to start looking at changes in the landscape. Satellite imagery is scheduled through 2011.

XIII. Conservation Strategy Development

Jeanette Dahl, Director of Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance (LVEA) told the RAC that the organization deals with Churchill County, the City of Fallon and the Truckee/Fallon Conservation District. The Alliance is trying to preserve the butterfly and keep OHV use at Sand Mountain. They have been meeting on a monthly basis since

2004. They have quite a few people from the community involved. Jeanette expressed appreciation for all the time people have spent on the project.

The completed butterfly conservation plan will go out to the different groups involved for their recommendations. It will also go to LVEA for their board approval. If Churchill County approves the plan it will become part of the county plan. The county has received \$790,000 in State Section 1 money for trails, education, etc.

The group could not come to consensus on the last map of designated routes presented to them by BLM. They hope they will have new cultural information at their meeting at the end of March and will be able to reach consensus at that time.

Brad Goetsch, Churchill County Manager, told the RAC that comparing the routes that were being used recently to routes being proposed there are about five percent of the OHV users' routes left. There have been increases in cheat grass and this plan doesn't go far enough in addressing that. Sand Mountain is the eighth most populated city in the state of Nevada on holiday weekends. BLM has brought a lot of staff time and money to the site but they need help. Sand Mountain will be one of the highest user fee areas in the country. The sand area seems to be spreading significantly in the last few years as seen in aerial photographs, but during wet year observations like last year you could see a lot of shoots coming out. The conservation plan went way beyond the butterfly and the Kearney buckwheat but to all sensitive species. Developing the plan has been a great effort. He thanked Claudia and Dean and the OHV groups for their hard work. He said he was looking forward to seeing the completion of the plan.

Don Hicks commented that the proposed emergency closure order [for Sand Mountain] must be put in the *Federal Register* to give authority to the designated routes. It is the legal vehicle to allow the BLM field manager to do the route designation and the land use plan amendment. In the amendment BLM will look at areas outside the closure area. The next steps after the emergency closure and route designations are to send the Conservation Plan to the USFWS and create a management strategy. Don said he was not sure if Churchill County issues will be included or not.

John Mudge asked if this area will remain closed until the land use plan is completed. Don answered yes.

Jim Eidel asked if all the route areas will be fenced. Don answered no. BLM may be able to put up Carsonite signs. There will be a variety of fencing and signing.

Laura Crane commented that she noticed there were a use area and a non use area. She asked if there was a difference in how those areas are being managed. Terry Knight answered that the recreation area was meant to designate the areas that BLM thought were the best opportunities for recreation. It had nothing to do with the Kearney buckwheat or the butterfly. BLM didn't know about either of them when the line was designated.

Craig Young asked if the cultural inventories that Jeanette mentioned would be under BLM authority. Don answered yes. Rochanne Downs commented that they are just preliminary. The full NEPA process has not been done.

John Dicks commented to Rochanne that she made a plea about Sand Mountain before she was part of the RAC. He asked if she felt satisfied dealing with the issues brought up at that meeting. Rochanne commented that speaking as a Tribal member all of the interests are dealing with the issues.

John Dicks asked Claudia Funari what she meant by “complicated route plan.” Claudia answered that she meant gauging the success of the route plan is complicated, not the plan itself. John continued that he found the pictures of the fires in the shrubs to be emotionally effecting. Brad Goetsch commented that the average guy who pulls his RV there who doesn’t stop and go to the kiosk wouldn’t even know there is something important out there. He told the RAC he has taken his family out there on quiet days and there are no ATVs out there. John told Don Hicks he thought the RAC ought to focus on the fire issue.

Laurie Sada, Assistant Field Supervisor for USFWS, Reno, told the RAC that the USFWS has been a part of this conservation group from the beginning. They were petitioned in April 2004 to list the butterfly. They have received a complaint to take a look at the proposed action. The petition will be looked at on July 28, 2006. If USFWS thinks the petition is warranted for listing the species, a 60-day public comment period will begin on July 28. April 27, 2007 the status review will be published. The conservation plan will come into play during the status review.

John Falen commented that with the effort that was going on it seemed to him that [USFWS] ought to wait and see if it plays out before listing the butterfly. Laurie Sada answered that there is a legal responsibility to proceed once the petition to list as an endangered species has been received.

If the species is listed USFWS would probably move into a regulatory period. The BLM would have to consult with the USFWS for any management action at Sand Mountain.

The listing of the species depends on the threats to the species not the scope of the areas where the species occurs.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) protects plants where they are.

John Gebhardt asked what the RAC could do to move the plan further. Rochanne commented that she didn’t think the RAC was ready to endorse the conservation plan yet. It is still in draft. Don Hicks commented that it may be appropriate at the June meeting.

John Gebhardt thanked LVEA and all the other members of the conservation group. He said it was a good step forward.

MOVED – by John Gebhardt as a motion of the members present to endorse the planning process for the blue butterfly.

SECOND – by John Dicks.

DISCUSSION – John Dicks said he would like to see Rochanne Down's response a little more positive on the cultural aspects. Rochanne answered that she does share some of her opinions with the group but her Tribe's opinions are between their government and the BLM. She continued that personally she thought the plan was a good start. John Gebhardt reminded the RAC that the plan is just for the butterfly, not a land use plan. John Falen commented that he would vote for the motion on the table out of respect for the people who have worked on the problem.

APPROVED – with one abstention by Rochanne Downs.

XIV. Public Comment

Richard Hilton, Friends of Sand Mountain, commented that there had been a lot of discussion about Russian thistle although the Russian thistle is in areas the OHV people don't go. The fence that you saw down was just a temporary fence. It has been very frustrating in the process, but our group has one problem with the route plan. The one that is out there could be acceptable but then there is a new map. We can deal with that, but every time we go to a meeting there is a new map. We're down to 21 ½ miles on the new routes now. Why do we need to even do these things when our route system is being cut? The new route plan that was presented the other night doesn't work. We have routes denied which don't even pertain to the butterfly or the Kearney buckwheat. Why can't we relocate the routes? We are compromising a whole lot as a user group. Let's relocate or take it out. We need to work on the new map to try to come up with a solution. Don Hicks answered that he met with Richard and Dan Peterson last week. The map they saw last Tuesday was a result of that revision and of Leo Drumm going out and looking at the site again. He told Richard that he appreciated his frustration. The most recent narration is the one that he's ready to sign off on.

John Gebhardt commented that it's a process that has to be flexible. He advised Richard to not give up on his flexibility.

Richard continued that Friends of Sand Mountain were ready to approve the map the other night but the one they saw Tuesday night was one they hadn't seen before.

Jim Eidel commented that one of the things they can say to their group is that BLM is still mapping the Kearney buckwheat

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Dan Peterson, Northern Director for CORVA, told the RAC that there was a comment about the ESA saying the policy was to put it in the endangered species part of the document. There has been a change in the policy to say study the species first. The other aspect is on the slide presentations. Dean is very good at only showing the negative things that are happening at Sand Mountain. He continued that he had to commend Dean

on his picture taking. There are a lot of places out there that are still pristine after the heavy weekends. One thing that Dan said he finds very distasteful is that they [the photos] don't show what is happening today. We want to show you the whole picture not just one side.

The RAC asked that an update on monitoring be put on the agenda for the June 28-29 meeting in Winnemucca.

John Dicks suggested giving the RAC the article that he found in the *New York Times* about Nevada pumping water. He commented that it was something the RAC ought to talk about. Jo Simpson suggested that the article is probably online.

XV. Meeting adjourned at 4:27 pm.